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ABSTRACT

The proposed project, mentioned in Vladimir Petric's articles "From Written Film History to Visual Film History," is a book intended as a teaching vehicle for college and university film courses and involving shot-by-shot analysis and evaluation of films as primary study material. Cinematic values are emphasized both because cinematic visual language was almost entirely developed and mastered during the silent film era and because considerable material already exists on contextual or thematic analysis of major films. The films chosen for screening exemplify the various styles of significant filmmakers and the schools to which they belong. Each film is studied analytically, focusing on the formal structure of the work. Material in the 16 chapters follows the technical and stylistic development of the medium, with the general approach being historical. Chapter topics range from the birth of cinema to the avant-garde of the 1920's. (JM)

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A VISUAL/ANALYTICAL HISTORY OF THE SILENT CINEMA (1895-1930)

by

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Vladimir Petric:

A VISUAL/ANALYTICAL HISTORY OF THE SILENT CINEMA (1895-1930)

This history of the SILENT CINEMA is conceived not to be READ, but to be HEARD and SEEN by students of film appreciation. In its structure a one-hour lecture and interpretation by the teacher is followed by the close analysis of sequences from the films screened the previous night (complemented by use of the Steenbeck or the Athena projector). The prints of all sequences/excerpts are the essential part of this history. They are the visual material that constitutes the student's primary research source. The printed text is supplementary commentary to accompany the eight hours of study film.

As such this book is intended as a teaching vehicle for film courses in colleges and universities. At the same time it can be considered as an analytical/critical study of significant films covering the evolution of the cinema from its inception to the coming of sound.

The study of various trends and genres is based upon a cinematic examination of specific films. The material is discussed and presented chronologically, following the technological and stylistic development of the medium. While the general approach is historical, the strategy for the study of each separate film is analytical, concerned with the formal structure of the work. Films chosen for screening and discussion exemplify various styles of significant filmmakers and the schools to which they belong. Analysis is centered upon the cinematic structure of each film and concentrated particularly upon the description of formal devices and the auditory/visual

means by which they express the content.

There are two main reasons for this emphasis on cinematic values. First, the visual language of the cinema was almost entirely developed and mastered during the silent era. Formal explication of the great silent films makes it possible for students to understand the kinesthetic nature of cinema in general, and to anticipate the interrelationship between the visual structure and the auditory component of the sound cinema. Second, there exists already much material on contextual or thematic analysis of major films. Such books are generally accessible and widely used. Most tend to slight formal aspects of films and prop themselves on impressionistic generalization from cursory viewing. The present work is intended to correct this imbalance in critical emphasis. It will not ignore questions of themes and content of the films and their most typical excerpts.

The chronology of the analysed sequences is aimed at enabling the student not only to follow the evolution of film language theoretically and historically, but also to comprehend the practical shooting procedure and method of a given filmmaker and to perceive the specific features of a cinematic style, school or genre. The precise shot-by-shot analysis of forty sequences will help students to distinguish cinematic devices from extra-cinematic components (e.g. literary, theatrical, pictorial, graphic) of a film structure, and will serve as the supplementary material for teachers of film appreciation (history, theory, criticism).

Each chapter of this text-book will contain the following sections:

1. General introduction to a movement, genre, or style; its historical significance and cinematic characteristics; its main proponents and their sources and influence.

2. In-depth cinematic analysis of a film chosen to typify a trend or school.
3. Shot-by-shot analysis and professional examination of the most cinematic sequences in the exemplary film and several other influential films of the same style.
4. Biography of a director representative of the style or genre.
5. Annotated filmography of the director, emphasizing esthetically important available films.
6. Annotated bibliography of useful books and articles on the cinematic trend, films and filmmakers under consideration.

The material of the book is divided into sixteen chapters, each devoted to a major trend, genre or school. Topics are arranged in approximate chronological order and are preceded by a general introduction which strives to establish the historical and theoretical relationships among various styles and movements.

It is important to reiterate that this book represents an analytical study and not a complete history of the silent cinema. Authors and films are selected mainly to support an exploration of the development of cinematic language; only the most influential filmmakers are considered, and only their most artistic achievements, in order to permit a direct analysis of cinematic values.

For practical purposes each chapter is designed to provide complete coverage of its subject in four hours of classroom time. The instructor is encouraged to use it as a paradigm for the introduction of a movement through (1) a lecture, (2) a screening and (3) subsequent analysis with discussion. A suggested strategy for teaching each topic would include:

1. General introduction to a movement (lecture, 45 minutes).
2. Screening of the Main Film or films (2 hours or more).
3a. Cinematic analysis of the most significant sequences of the suggested film, with stop-motion projector if possible (45 minutes).
3b. General discussion (formal and thematic) of the films screened and the exemplified style or school as a whole (45 minutes).

TOPICS

1. THE BIRTH OF THE CINEMA: REALITY AND ILLUSION

Louis and Auguste Lumière Newsreels, 1895-1896
Georges Méliès Fantasy Films: A Trip to the Moon (Le voyage dans la lune), 1902
The Conquest of the Pole (A la conquête du pôle), 1912
Ferdinand Zecca Films: Scenes of Convict Life (Au bagne), 1905
Slippery Jim, (Metempsychose) 1907
Whence Does He Come? (D'où vient-il?), ca.1907
Edwin S. Porter Films: The Great Train Robbery, 1903
The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend, 1907

Sequences for analysis:

A Trip to the Moon: trip to the Moon and final landing, showing motion tricks and the first close-up (the moon).

Slippery Jim: Jim's transformation into a "snake" of clothing and the flattening of a pursuing policeman; trick actions in an authentic setting.

The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend: The rarebit fiend in a drunken stupor superimposed upon a subjective rendition of his tipsy perception of the world around him.

The inception of two basic trends in world cinema: the exploration of reality and the embodiment of fantasy. Early Lumière prises de vues stress realism. Méliès' trick films represent the cinematicization of theatrical prestidigitation through the use of camera tricks (stop motion, double exposure, reverse motion). Both fantastic and realistic tendencies meet in the varied oeuvre of Zecca: real milieu and reverse motion in Whence Does He Come?, social realism in Scenes of Convict Life, the fusion of realism and fantasy in Slippery Jim, remarkable for the use of camera movement, pixilation and reverse motion. Porter's work is important for its early use of editing to tell a story; his Rarebit Fiend represents the flowering of the Méliès type trick film in America. His Great Train Robbery marks the beginning of the Western genre and the primitive use of

parallel editing to dramatize the narrative.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDITING BY D.W. GRIFFITH

The Lonely Villa, 1909
A Corner in Wheat, 1909
The Lonedale Operator, 1911
The Musketeers of Pig Alley, 1912
The Birth of a Nation, 1915
Intolerance, 1916

Sequences for analysis:

The Lonely Villa: an early instance of the "last minute rescue" in the finale, with intercut parallel action.

The Musketeers of Pig Alley: a deep-focus mise-en-scène through which a line of gangsters advances along a wall from background into large close-up.

Intolerance: mise-en-scène in deep perspective and use of symbolic detail in the scene of the Industrialist's spinster sister at a grand reception.

Griffith's role in developing film syntax, inspired by and opposed to the literary syntax. The principle of parallel action, and its evolution from Biograph shorts to the four-fold development of narrative in Intolerance. Other Griffith devices: large close-up, panoramic long shot, extensive tracking shot. His style as expressed in establishing sequences and the famed "last minute rescue". His themes, content and philosophy related to his cinematic style. His literary inspiration and influence on other filmmakers.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE SPECTACLE

Cabiria (Piero Fosco, 1914)
The Ten Commandments (Cecil B. DeMille, 1923)
Napoléon (Abel Gance, 1926)

Sequences for analysis:

Cabiria: the Siege of Syracuse.
The Ten Commandments: the Parting of the Red Sea.
Napoléon: the Two Tempests (the storm at sea and in the Convention)

Examination of the genre with special regard for cinematic qualities such as mass mise-en-scène, authenticity of the architectural reconstruction, various shooting techniques (optical tricks, scale models, process shots, painted backgrounds). The difference between the theatrical concept of reconstructing historic settings, and cinematic exploration of the atmosphere in a reconstructed environment.

4. THE VISUAL DYNAMISM OF SILENT COMEDY

Max Linder Early Films, 1906-1912
Mack Sennett Keystone Kops shorts
Shoulder Arms! (Charles Chaplin, 1918)
The Cameraman (Buster Keaton, 1928)

Sequences for analysis:

A typical Keystone Kops chase: dynamism achieved by movement in the frame

Shoulder Arms!: the flooding sequence, in which gags are dependent upon the mise-en-scène.

The Cameraman: The Tong War sequence, emphasizing "the film within a film" technique and the dynamic composition of the shot.

The development and contrast of various silent film comedy styles. Importance of the physical movement before the camera; the cinematization of the gag; the particular distinctions between stagey gags and comic mise-en-scène and their cinematic equivalents. The difference between theatrical pantomime and cinematic pantomime. Personal styles of Linder, Chaplin and Keaton. The influence of silent comedy on the modern cinema.

5. HISTRIONIC AND GRAPHIC STYLIZATION OF EXPRESSIONISM

The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari (Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari), Robert Wiene, 1920
Waxworks (Das Wachsfigurenkabinet) Paul Leni, 1924

Sequences for analysis:

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Cesare abducts the girl through stylized sets conceived as independent pictorial units.

Waxworks: the final sequence of Jack the Ripper in pursuit of the protagonists. In it are combined graphic stylization, camera tricks, graphic distortion produced by camera technique and film process.

The first phase of German Expressionist cinema, was dominated by stylization of mise-en-scène and acting, fantastic content and stationary camera. The pictorial component prevail - the screen was treated as a canvas on which the filmmaker "printed" fantastic visions, and animated them by means of the camera.

6. THE FUNCTION OF LIGHT AND DECOR IN EXPRESSIONISM

Metropolis (Fritz Lang), 1926
The Last Laugh - Der Letzte Mann (F.W. Murnau), 1924

Sequences for analysis:

Metropolis: the spectacular construction of the factory machinery transformed into Moloch.

The Last Laugh: the hallway sequence showing use of the moving camera through an ambiance reconstructed in the studio.

The importance of lighting, shooting angles and camera movement in mainstream German Expressionist cinema. The apogee of architectural expressionism in Metropolis, with its universal symbolism. In contrast to this trend, the Kammerspielfilm typified by Murnau's The Last Laugh, reveals an intimate study of character through minute analysis of small human gestures, and subtle facial expression.

7. LANDSCAPE AND NATIONAL LEGEND IN THE SCANDINAVIAN FILM

The Outlaw and His Wife - Berg-Ejvind och hans hustru (Victor Sjostrom) 1917
The Treasure of Arne - Herr Arnes pengar (Mauritz Stiller) 1919

Sequences for analysis:

Outlaw: flashback sequence in which the wife's memory of her dead child is superimposed upon the landscape.

Treasure of Arne: the final sequence, a funeral march over a lake of ice - with the balance of black and white areas within the frame.

The evocation of atmosphere and regional ethos in Scandinavia through use of outdoor photography and contextual use of national folklore and legend, particularly as refracted through the novels of Selma Lagerlöf. Contrast the realism of Sjöström with the romantic exoticism of Stiller's approach to legend. Consideration of the later work of Sjöström and Stiller in Hollywood.

8. PENETRATION INTO THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Witchcraft Through the Ages - Haxan (Benjamin Christensen), 1922
The Passion of Joan of Arc - La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (Carl Theodor Dreyer), 1928

Sequences for analysis:

Withcraft: the Witches' Sabbat, emphasizing choreography of movement before the camera.

Joan of Arc: Rhythmic montage of torture objects in gradually increasing tempo juxtaposed with large close-ups of Joan's face.

Exploration of extreme psychological states by Scandinavian directors. Quasi-documentary aspects of Häxan. Dreyer's use of camera placement, mise-en-scène, large close-ups, and rhythmic montage in The Passion of Joan of Arc. Dreyer's power of cinematic abstraction, and his theoretical statements on the medium.

9. THE ANALYSIS OF HUMAN CHARACTERS AND DEPICTION OF ENVIRONMENT

Greed (Erich von Stroheim) 1924
The Big Parade (King Vidor) 1928

Sequences for analysis:

Greed: the Trina/McTeague fight sequence showing analysis of human conflict and use of the metaphoric intercut (symbolic objects).

The Big Parade: the departure sequence, showing the isolation of individuals within mass movement in an exterior sets.

American approaches to psychological realism in the Twenties. Stroheim's style: use of the stationary camera, long take, associative intercuts, symbolic details. The function of editing and mise-en-scène in Vidor's film. Elliptic structure of the culminative sequences; realism versus romanticism. Comparison: the image of World War I in other American films of the period.

10. THE DEPICTION OF ATMOSPHERE THROUGH MOVEMENT AND MISE-EN-SCENE

Sunrise (F.W. Murnau), 1927
The Docks of New York (Josef von Sternberg), 1928
The Fall of the House of Usher (James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber) 1928

Sequences for analysis:

Sunrise: the travelling shots which follow the peasant man and the city woman to the marsh and the seduction scene, showing "UFA effects".

The Docks of New York: the bar sequence, illustrating psychological intercutting.

The function of shooting angles and camera movement in American films of the late Twenties by German or German-trained directors. Lighting, camera placement and camera movement through forced perspective sets in Sunrise. Lighting, shooting angles and "montage" in The Docks of New York. Excursus on German influence on the American silent film, including lighting, camera placement and travelling and the "special effects". The formal influence of German Expressionism on the American avant-garde experimentation in the works of Watson and Webber.

11. SPECIFICS OF SILENT FILM ACTING: KULESHOV AND THE "FEX" SCHOOL

By the Law - Po zakonu (Lev Kuleshov), 1926
The Overcoat - Shinel' (Kozintsev and Trauberg), 1926

Sequences for analysis:

By the Law: the fighting sequence, emphasizing dramatic juxtaposition of close-ups and details of action

The Overcoat: Akakij's dream sequence (from part One), emphasizing composition and stylization of decor, and indication of character's imagination.

Soviet approaches to acting by Kuleshov and the "FEX" School (Factory of the Eccentric Actor). The "Kuleshov Effect". Expressionist elements in the lighting and mise-en-scène of Shinel'. The relationship of literary movements to Soviet film in the Twenties. Residues from contemporary theatrical theory and practice.

12. MONTAGE SYNTAX OF FILM: VISUAL RHYTHM

Strike - Stacka (Sergei Eisenstein) 1924
Battleship Potemkin - Bronenosec Potemkin, 1925
Old and New / The General Line - Staroe i novoe, 1928

Sequences for analysis:

Strike: opening sequence, in a metrical montage the visual leitmotiv of wheels is introduced.

Battleship Potemkin: the Odessa Steps sequence: dynamic montage and time extension.

Old and New: the procession and cream separator sequences which exemplifies overtonal editing.

Soviet montage as elaborated in the work of Eisenstein. Function of the juxtaposition of short pieces of film, figures of montage and their cognitive effects. Temporal expansion of the event through montage in Potemkin. Eisenstein's concept of acting: "typage" as opposed to Kuleshov's concept of "naturscik".

13. REALITY AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION THROUGH FILMIC IMAGES

Mother - Mat' (Vsevolod Pudovkin), 1926
Earth - Zemlya (Alexandr Dovzhenko), 1930

Sequences for analysis:

Mother: the demonstration sequence for its associative editing.

Earth: the death of Vasil for use of atmosphere and landscape as metaphor.

Pudovkin's concept of acting and his adaptation of montage technique to narrative cinema. Dovzhenko's use of global metaphor in epic structure. Mise-en-scène in Mother; mise-en-cadre in Earth; Function of the still shot and indication of human thought processes by means of symbolic insertion of detail. The "block montage" - the interrelationship of entire sequences.

14. THE DOCUMENTARY TRADITION

Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty), 1922
Rain - Regen (Joris Ivens), 1929
Man with the Movie Camera - Chelovek s kinoapparatom (Dziga Vertov), 1929

Sequences for analysis:

Nanook: storm sequence, showing authenticity of the environment by use of details and long shots.

Rain: the end of the rain storm, showing impressionistic photography and editing.

Man with the movie camera: the awakening sequence, showing photocinematic distortion of the illusion of reality.

Various approaches to the silent documentary, from the stationary camera, non-montage ethnographical approach of Flaherty to the impressionism of Ivens' editing and the dynamic montage of Vertov. This chapter, while not intended to give an exhaustive survey of the documentary genre in the silent era, indicates how the main trends and styles of the documentary tradition were established during the Twenties. The three filmmakers chosen to represent the documentary genre in the

silent period illustrate three different attitudes toward the problem of cinematic authenticity which were also characteristic of many feature films of the period, and which still represent the main issue of the contemporary documentary filmmaking.

15. NON-NARRATIVE AND SURREALIST AVANT-GARDE OF THE TWENTIES

Entr'acte (Rene Clair), 1924
Menilmontant (Dmitri Kirsanov), 1925
The smiling Mrs. Beudet - La souriante Madame Beudet (Germain Dulac), 1924
An Andalusian Dog - Un chien Andalou (Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali), 1928

Sequences for analysis:

Entr'acte: final chase sequence, showing abstraction of the notion of movement through various cinematic effects.

Menilmontant: the murder of the parents, showing cinematic conveyance of mental processes through montage of the "inner images".

The Smiling Madame Beudet: the mirror sequence, showing cinematic stream-of-consciousness technique.

An Andalousian Dog: Whole film.

Styles of the French avant-garde film: the surrealist chase of Clair; the impressionism, psychological probing and dissolution of traditional narrative line in Kirsanov; the concept of "stream-of-consciousness" as applied to cinema by Germain Dulac. This topic is included to serve as a comparison, i.e. to show how unconventional cinematic expression was conceived by outstanding experimental filmmakers of the Twenties and in what way their achievements reacted to and influenced traditional filmmaking.

16. FORMAL AND STRUCTURALIST AVANT-GARDE OF THE TWENTIES

Ballet mechanique (Fernand Leger and Dudley Murphy), 1924
Rhythmus 21 (Hans Richter), 1921
Symphonie Diagonale (Viking Eggeling), 1921-1924

H2O (Raplh Steiner), 1924
Emak Bakia (Man Ray), 1927
Studies 6, 7, 8 (Oscar Fischinger), 1929-1930

Sequences for analysis:

Significant parts of all the cited films will be analyzed to clarify their style and specific structure.

German, French and American specimens of formal avant-garde. Leger's attempt to extend the concept of abstract formal relationships between objects to the screen. Richter's and Eggeling's experiments with dynamization and transformation of graphic forms using their scroll technique in cinematic terms. Steiner's montage analysis of objects in nature and re-creation of an optical symphony composed of photographed details of natural objects which gain abstract qualities on the screen. Ray's use of "all the tricks that might annoy certain spectators," and his attempt to subordinate cinema to the dadaist non-aesthetic principle.